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ABSTRACT

A discussion of block scheduling for second language instruction looks at the advantages and disadvantages and offers some suggestions for classroom management and course organization. It is argued that block scheduling may offer a potential solution to large classes, insufficient time for labs, too little individualized instruction; few team-teaching opportunities, too-short class, lunch, and planning periods, and too many dropouts. Specific advantages for teachers include: greater immersion in the target language; fewer classroom interruptions; less clerical work; and in some cases, fewer students per class. Special concerns for teachers are continuity, content and methodology, and standardized tests. Students may benefit from longer time frames, more remedial and advanced instruction, increased opportunity for success in a smaller number of courses, and enhanced quality and quantity of time spent with the teacher. Several models of block scheduling are described, and the pros and cons of each are outlined. Tips for effective planning and teaching focus on best use of the longer class time, exploitation of multiple intelligence theory, and alternative forms of assessment. Two sample lesson plans are included. Contains 10 references. (MSE)

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Surviving Block Scheduling

Marjorie Haley

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Surviving Block Scheduling

Abstract

Foreign language teachers today find themselves being asked to assume more and more responsibility in accommodating the numerous needs of students and to radically change their teaching styles to include Block Scheduling, implement the Standards, and utilize modern technology. For some, this is a source of major conflict and concern. The old way was just fine. For others, change is exciting and invigorating and the realm of creative and successful possibilities is endless. The following is an excerpt from a workshop entitled, "You, Too Can Meet the Challenge and Survive in Block Scheduling" presented at the American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages, Nashville, Tennessee.

Introduction

Block Scheduling is based on the preference for in-depth instruction and extended learning sequences. Data is gradually being collected comparing learning outcomes and teacher and student reactions. Is Block Scheduling a trend? Will we move away from this and on to something else in a few years? The answers to those questions lie in how teachers meet the challenge and succeed in this longer time frame.

Block Scheduling may offer a potential solution to: classes too large, insufficient time for labs, too many failures, too little individualized instruction, few team-teaching opportunities, too short class, lunch and planning periods, and too many dropouts.

Foreign language teachers may find the following benefits of Block Scheduling: a 90 minute immersion in the target language greatly helps students, fewer interruptions during class and less clerical work. Additionally, some teachers boast of having fewer total students each semester, less paperwork and grading.

However, special concerns for foreign language teachers are continuity, content and methodology, and standardized tests. A traditional two-semester, 50-minute course meeting 180 days provides 9000 minutes of instruction. Whereas a class that meets 90 minutes per day for 90 days offers 8100 minutes of instruction.

Block Scheduling provides the following advantages for students: longer time frames, more remedial and advanced instruction, increased opportunity for success in four courses rather than six, enhances the quality and quantity of time each student spends with a teacher.

Descriptions and Types of Block Scheduling

The main principle underlying Block Scheduling is based on a preference for in-depth instruction and extended learning sessions. There are two frequently-used models of Block Scheduling: the 4 X 4 model and the Rotating Block model.

The 4 X 4 model is also called the Straight Block or the 90/90 model. Students take four 90-minute classes a day, five days a week, for an entire semester. When the second semester begins, students take four different 90-minute classes a day, five days a week, for the remainder of the school year. Thus, students take a total of 8 classes each year, which adds up to a total of 32 over the course of their high school education. (This is an increase from the normal 24.)

The 4 X 4 Model

Course One: French I (7:30-9:00)	Course Five: French II (7:30-9:00)
Course Two: Algebra I (9:05-10:35)	Course Six: History (9:05-10:35)
Lunch: 10:40-11:10	Lunch: 10:40-11:10
Course Three: English (11:15-12:45)	Course Seven: Biology (11:15-12:45)
Course Four: Gym (12:50-2:20)	Course Eight: Art (12:50-2:20)

The 4 X 4 block offers many positive outcomes such as:

* Students have fewer classes to concentrate on, hopefully leading to better performance
* Longer blocks of time for instruction
* Enhances the quality and quantity of time teacher spends with each student
* Sufficient time for lab classes and visits to language and computer labs
* Less "changing time" between classes during the day (4 as compared to 8)
* Fewer preparations for teachers
* Greater opportunity for individualized instruction
* More opportunity for group work and cooperative learning activities
* Fewer class interruptions
* Greater ability to make connections, both within and between different areas of the curriculum
* Greater opportunity for team teaching

However, there are also some disadvantages that must be addressed when considering the 4 X 4 model. Some of these include:

* More time is needed to prepare for a 90-minute class
* Generally, less material can be covered in a semester-long class, than a year-long class
* Lack of continuity between two course levels. For example, if a student takes French I in the fall and French II the following fall, there will have been an eight-month gap between the two courses.
* Teachers may be required to teach more than 5 graduation-credit classes a year, thus increasing their work load
* It is incredibly difficult for a student to transfer (in or out) of a school on the 4 X 4 plan, due to its unique nature
* Difficulty preparing students for standardized tests (such as the AP exam, or college placements exams) since students cover less material and they may take the course in the fall and the standardized test in the spring.

Another popular model of Block Scheduling is the Rotating Block, also referred to as the Flexible Block, the A-B Block Schedule or the Eight-Block Schedule. With the Rotating Block model, students take four 90-minute classes on one day, and then four different 90-minute classes the next day. This schedule continues on a rotating basis throughout the entire school year. Thus, students are taking a total of 8 classes for the entire year, which adds up to 32 classes over the course of their high school education. A model, with sample classes is shown below:

The Rotating Block Model

Course One: French I (7:30-9:00)	Course Five: French II (7:30-9:00)
Course Two: Algebra (9:05-10:35)	Course Six: History (9:05-10:35)
Lunch: 10:40-11:10	Lunch: 10:40-11:10
Course Three: English (11:15-12:45)	Course Seven: Biology (11:15-12:45)
Course Four: Gym (12:50-2:20)	Course Eight: Art (12:50-2:20)

The Rotating Block Schedule has many positive attributes, some of which overlap those of the 4 X 4 schedule:

* Students have 2 days to complete their homework
* Provides students with more opportunities to learn. Under Block Scheduling, students sign up for 8 classes instead of 7
* Sufficient time for lab classes and visits to language and computer labs
* Spreads teacher preps over two days and therefore provides more flexibility in scheduling
* Allows time for diverse activities such as field trips, guest speakers, technology, films, etc.
* More opportunity for individualized instruction
* Compared to every day models, alternate day schedules mean that students have fewer classes, quizzes, tests, and homework assignments on any one day
* More opportunity for group work and cooperative learning activities
* Fewer class interruptions
* Greater opportunity for team teaching

Even though students now have the continuity of taking a course for an entire year (as opposed to the 4 X 4 block), there are problems to consider with the Rotating Block schedule as well. One of the main concerns is that since teachers only see a student at most every other day, often times it takes a bit of review during class time for students to recall what was covered the day before. In this same vein, when there is a long weekend or holiday vacation, a lot of information can be forgotten and will need to be reviewed or re-taught during the next class. Further, when students are absent, it is more difficult for them to make up the work (since it is essentially work for 2 classes that they need to make up), and when they return to class, it has been far too long without hearing the foreign language to be able to pick up right where they left off.

Teachers must consider the instructional issues. Many teachers voice concern that students will not be able to pay attention for the longer block scheduling periods. However, experience suggests that it is not the length of a particular class, but rather, what takes place in that class that holds the students' attention. If teachers assume that an entire teacher-centered format of instruction is the best approach for block scheduling, consider this again! A variety of activities and careful planning will offer the best solution.

Effective Planning and Teaching Strategies

Teacher planning is paramount to the success of the implementation of Block Scheduling. A well planned 90-minute class has the potential to go by very quickly, whereas, a poorly-planned class will feel more like day-long class. The main objective in planning is to provide a wide variety of activities - both teacher and student-centered. Additionally, teachers must address their students' numerous learning styles and intelligences.

Work smarter, not harder. Have students take more responsibility for their learning. One way to do this is through cooperative learning, group, and paired activities. Engage students in activities in which they work together and the teacher becomes the facilitator. Additionally, teachers can use skits, improvisations, dramatizations, and role plays. Encourage students to participate and to become involved in the planning of activities for their class. Most importantly, provide variety in your planning efforts: time to read, write, listen, discuss, experience, experiment, analyze, compute, produce and create.

Another effective strategy which can be used with Block Scheduling is the use of learning stations/centers. These may be organized according to themes, preferred learning styles, or multiple intelligences. These are a great way to move the students around from one task to the next, while working in cooperative groups. Many objectives can be tailored to suit a particular station. Learning stations allow the teacher to divide the class into groups of 4 or 5 and designate work sites at various locations around the room. Each site is equipped with specific instructions, materials, and any necessary equipment, e.g., cassette recorder, computer, markers, etc. Students are given specific time directions and the teacher facilitates instruction by moving around to each station, offering assistance where needed.

Tips and Strategies For Surviving The Longer Time Frame

* Flood the classroom with the target language
* Utilize native speakers (where possible)
* Creative, careful planning is critical
* Try teaching for 30-minutes chunks, then break into groups or paired activities
* Engage students in leading activities - move instruction away from always being teacher-centered
* Utilize multiple forms of realia
* Ensure that all 4 skills are covered - (LSRW)
* Provide multiple opportunities for every student to speak during each class

Block Scheduling and Howard Gardner's Multiple Intelligences

Howard Gardner's Multiple Intelligences Theory presents the notion that there is no "general intelligence," but rather that each person has seven distinct intelligences that can be developed throughout their lifetime. According to Dr. Gardner, the mind is organized around many distinct functional capacities, which he defines as "intelligences." Each intelligence involves elements that may have evolved separately. Each of the intelligences is developed independently of the others, however, they usually work together and do not often appear in isolation.

Gardner identified and labeled seven main styles of acquiring and demonstrating knowledge; those seven intelligences are **Verbal/Linguistic, Logical/Mathematical, Interpersonal/Social, Intrapersonal/Introspective, Musical/Rhythmic, Bodily/Kinesthetic, Visual/Spatial,** and the **Naturalist**.

Verbal/Linguistic Intelligence consists of the ability to effectively manipulate language to express oneself. It also allows one to use language as a means to remember information.
Logical/Mathematical Intelligence involves the ability to detect patterns, calculate, think logically, and carry out mathematical operations.
Interpersonal/Social Intelligence is the ability to recognize and understand the feelings of others and interact appropriately with others.
Intrapersonal/Introspective Intelligence is the ability to perceive one's own feelings and motivations which can be used in planning and directing one's life.
Musical/Rhythmic Intelligence is evident in those who demonstrate the ability to recognize and or compose tonal changes, rhythms, and musical pitches.
Bodily/Kinesthetic Intelligence allows one the ability to use one's mental abilities to manipulate and coordinate one's bodily movements.
Visual/Spatial Intelligences gives one the ability to perceive and manipulate images in order to solve problems.
The **Naturalist** involves the ability to recognize and classify the natural surroundings such as flora and fauna, rock, minerals, and animals.

The larger time frame allowed by Block Scheduling enables the teacher to meet the individualistic needs of every student and therefore cater to the Multiple Intelligences Theory. Teachers can structure the presentation of material in a style that engages most or all of the intelligences. Gardner states that, "linking the Multiple Intelligences with a curriculum focused on understandings is an extremely powerful intellectual undertaking" (Gardner, 1993). Does this mean that teachers need to overhaul their lessons to individualize instruction to the varied intelligences? Linda Campbell suggests that the theory of Multiple Intelligences provides a framework for enhancing instruction and a mental model for developing curriculum to improve themselves as educators (Campbell, 1997).

Campbell suggests that a beginning point should be reflection on the theme or concept and identification of the intelligences which are most appropriate for implementing the lesson (Campbell, 1997). Gardner adds that a matching system of a student and his strongest intelligences can ensure that a student rapidly and smoothly masters what needs to be mastered and then can proceed to optional paths of development (Gardner, 1982). This matching system as described by Gardner allows the responsibility for the learning to be upon the student and the student becomes center stage, not the teacher.

By helping students identify their preferred learning intelligence, the teacher can encourage the learning process by allowing students to learn and acquire the target language through appropriate activities. As a rule, the seven Multiple Intelligences should not be thought of as independent and isolated approaches, but rather, the intelligences should be intertwined and used in conjunction with each other to create the best possible learning experience for all students (Armstrong, 1994).

The Multiple Intelligence Theory fits quite nicely with Block Scheduling because it recognizes and validates the fact that every person is an individual who acquires, learns and demonstrates knowledge through different means. Teachers should not feel overwhelmed at the thought of trying to address all seven intelligences in separate activities in one lesson. Not only is it not feasible, it is <u>not</u> necessary. By using manipulatives or puzzles, the Bodily/Kinesthetic and Logical/Mathematical intelligences are strengthened. Using technology is another perfect example of simultaneously accommodating multiple intelligences. For example, students can work in groups to complete a written exercise on the internet in which they have to find information on the World Wide Web to use for a specific task. This activity strengthens the Interpersonal/Social Intelligence (provides group work), the Logical/Mathematical Intelligence (asks them to find information that is not readily available, i.e., problem solving), and their Verbal/Linguistic Intelligence (by providing instruction through reading and listening, and by asking students to write their final exercise). Additionally, the use of the computer as a "hands on" activity has the potential of strengthening the Bodily/Kinesthetic Intelligence as well as the Visual/Spatial Intelligence.

Block Scheduling and Technology

Recognizing the relationship between students and their Multiple Intelligences and Block Scheduling is crucial in creating an environment where students can learn and succeed. An additional aspect in creating this environment is making the learning process interactive with technology. Gardner substantiates the use of technology in his statement, "Computers offer a useful way to think about the marshalling of intelligences to master educational goals" (Gardner, 1982). The use of computer technology permits students to work at their own pace and review structures and concepts with which they may be having difficulty. Students maintain ownership when they are working with computers and the computer can be the facilitator of numerous activities that stimulate the multiple intelligences.

Technology now, as never before, offers teachers unlimited access to authentic resources, materials, and information. Teachers can find newspapers, magazines, brochures, schedules, maps, literature, historical and cultural information on places and events in a variety of countries around the world. Many of these include pictures, video and sound. With a computer, modem, phone line, Internet service provider, and perhaps a little guidance, the world is at our fingertips.

Technology projects used in Block Scheduling are usually quite successful. Such projects are a great way for teachers to utilize students' technological skills. The following are ten projects that have successful been used by foreign language teachers:

1) Find ten web sites relating to the target culture. Students must provide the Home Page address, a brief explanation of how to use this site to learn more about the target language and culture, a brief description of the site and an explanation of how the site was found.
2) Use HyperStudio to demonstrate your own adventure story.
3) Create a Web Page on the topic of your choice. Examples are: Skiing in the Alps, French Food, Bullfighting, etc. Include a guest book or counter so we can get feedback. Don't forget to include the URL.
4) Use the digital camera to take pictures of classmates. Give each student a questionnaire in the target language. Write a short profile of each student and put it next to the picture. Print it out to make a class book or upload it to the class' Web Page. May be done with a partner or in groups.

5) Make a video. Use actors of make an animated film. Commercials may be used. The minimum length is five minutes. This may be done in pairs or groups.
6) Interview someone in the target language and video tape it. Get permission to have the interview put online.
7) Use PowerPoint, HyperStudio or Slide Show to create a slide show in the target language. It can be used to teach current (or past) vocabulary, practice grammar concepts, or show pictures of a particular aspect of the target culture.
8) Go to one of the recommended sites and find a different proverb to teach to the class each week for one month.
9) Make contact with a target language key pal. Share your discussions on topics comparing their culture with the U.S.
10) Find something of particular interest on the Internet in the target culture that you can bring in to class and share each day for a week. For example: weather reports from major cities or current events found in target language newspapers.

Alternative Forms of Assessment and Block Scheduling

There is no one right way to assess students. Typical pencil and paper tests are efficiently ways of testing discrete points of knowledge, but they are not sufficient means of assessment for the productive skills, speaking and writing. A small sampling of alternative activities that can be manipulated to fit specific objectives include:

Performance tasks:

* Asking/giving directions
* Role playing
* Interviewing
* Using maps, schedules, menus
* Planning events

Portfolios:

* Demonstrate students growth and progress
* Should include video/audio cassettes as well as projects, surveys, and writings

Student Assessment:

* Checklists
* Evaluations
* Journals
* Learning logs

Performance-based Assessment requires students to show, in an authentic context, what they have learned. They integrate curriculum, instruction and assessment. When designing a performance-based activity, the teacher should keep in mind that a good performance assessment -

- asks learners to perform, create or produce something
- rewards skill development, creativity and linguistic accuracy
- is on-going throughout the year
- may involve self and/or peer assessment

Sample Lesson Plans

The following are two sample lesson plans that have successfully been used in block scheduling. The first plan demonstrates the use of learning stations/centers to reach objectives. In the second plan there is clear evidence of the use of multiple activities.

Lesson Plan One

Grades: 9 - 12
Level: French II
Number of Students: 30
Topic: The house and irregular verbs

Objectives:
Students will be able to correctly identify and use house vocabulary
Students will be able to correctly distinguish between different verb tenses

Warm-up Activity:
Use PowerPoint to scroll continuously through 15 different pictures of rooms in the house and furniture. The students are familiar with PowerPoint so they know that when they enter the class, they should be seated and begin their warm-up by writing the L2 equivalent of the picture they see.

Activities:
Students are to work at learning stations/centers. Each group will be given approximately 15 minutes at each station. There are a total of 6 groups, with five students in each group. The groups and their names are written on the board.
After most students have finished the warm-up, begin to explain to the class that they will be working at the learning stations, making certain to give very clear instructions and guidelines. Take all questions at this time. A bell is sounded and students begin. Students have 15 minutes at each station and the sounding of the bell announces the time to move to the next station. At the end of class students are given time to copy their homework, ask questions, and complete a "station evaluation."

Description of Stations:
Station One: The instructions tell students to work on the computers. They will be completing a scavenger hunt on HyperStudio.
Station Two: At this station the group works as a whole to complete pronunciation exercises along with a cassette player. The instructions are pre-recorded and written on paper taped to the table.
Station Three: Students work in pairs. One student is given a drawing of a house full of colorful pieces of furniture. The second student has a picture of an empty house. The first student will describe his/her picture in the L2. Student two may ask questions about student ones' description. Student two draws and adds pieces of furniture into his/her house until he/she thinks it matches student one's description. When student one sees that student two's picture is almost identical, they reverse.
Station Four: Students will individually read a story about an apartment building. This story contains the grammar, vocabulary and verbs being studied in this chapter. The students are asked to respond to questions about the reading in groups of three. One student in each threesome serves as the scribe and the others help in answering questions.

Station Five: Students work in pairs at this station to play the verb cube game. Directions: Assemble three piles of 10 flash cards with one verb written on each card. The verbs should be written in the L1 and each verb should be unique. Prepare "answer sheets" with the numbers 1-10 along the left-hand margin and a box for the score at the bottom. Use 6 styrofoam cubes with a subject pronoun on each side. Students will role a di and try to match the subject pronoun with the correct form of the verb.
Station Six: Students will use the computer to visit various web sites where they will investigate additional information about typical Spanish homes.

At the end of class each student is asked to fill out two evaluations: a group evaluation and a station evaluation. The group evaluation serves to show the teacher which groups and members worked well together. The station evaluation gives feedback on what students liked/disliked and those things they would like to see done differently.

Lesson Plan Two

Grades: 10 - 12
Level: Spanish III
Number of Students: 30
Current Unit: The Human Body

Objectives:
Students will be able to identify the correct usage of the commands with usted and ustedes
Students will be able to create commands with usted and ustedes related to health
Students will correctly distinguish between the regular forms of verbs and the command

Warm-up Activity:
Students will work in pairs to discuss how they are feeling today and how they felt yesterday.

Activities:
Students will complete a written activity displayed on the overhead. There are 10 questions in the L2 about their body parts.
Students will go to the overhead and write their answers. The class then reviews the students' answers and correct their own papers.
Students view a 10-minute video of Spanish commercials.
At various intervals the teacher stops the video to ask questions and probe for identification of command forms. As commands are identified from the video, a list is made on the board. At the conclusion of the video the class focuses on the new commands. The class will decide on other command forms that might have been used in the video.
Students break into previously assigned pairs and work together to write a script for their own Spanish commercial. They have 15 minutes. Volunteers will be asked to present.
Students play Simon Says, concentrating on using body parts and commands previously learned.

Sample Lesson

This plan can be implemented toward the end of a chapter in preparation for unit test.

I. Oral paired activity	(10 mins.)
(textbook)	
(assessment optional)	(10 mins.)
II. Listening activity with teacher or student directed questions taken from the textbook	(15 mins.)
III. Listening/Writing activity Cassette Tape directed grammar activity with workbook	(10 mins.)
IV. Grammar Assessment / Oral Peer assessment	(20 mins.)
V. Reminder of upcoming test Answer questions	(5 mins.)
VI. Video on Theme of the Chapter with worksheet (done in groups)	(20 mins.)

Total: 90 mins.

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